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ABSTRACT

Teachers at an elementary school in a working class neighborhood outside Houston, Texas, invited children and their parents to attend 10 Parent-Child Literacy Workshops held on Saturday mornings in spring 1994. Spanish and English speaking parents, together with their children, began each Saturday session by listening to their child read in the language of choice for 15 minutes in a soft tone. Parents were shown how to compute their child's oral reading rate. The children (including younger siblings) greatly enjoyed their "build up" readers--predictable, redundant, teacher-made books that start with a few words and build up by adding one word per page. After independent reading time, a short book was read and usually dramatized by the children in attendance. Each meeting's theme was reinforced with stories and songs. Each meeting modeled, demonstrated, and gave parents and children a chance to practice together a different comprehension strategy. A theme-related Bingo game (using vocabulary words taken from shared reading activities related to the theme) signaled the end of each meeting. At the end of the last meeting, parents and children expressed their gratitude for the opportunities they were given to sing, share, write, read, talk, and to create for 10 Saturdays a community of learners. (Contains 34 references.) (RS)

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# Parent Involvement Texas Style--The Parent-Child Literacy Acquisition Society


## Abstract

This article describes the content of ten Parent-Child Literacy Workshops held at an elementary school near Houston, Texas. These workshops were sponsored by the Texas Innovative Education Grant Program.


F. Elina Adams

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Parent Involvement: Texas Style
The Parent-Child Literacy Acquisition Society

If learning to read is a social process (Raphael & McMahon, 1994) then a young child's most significant model for this behavior is his or her parent (Meyer and Dusek, 1979). Therefore, teachers at an elementary school in a working class neighborhood outside Houston, with the support of an Innovative Education Grant awarded by the Texas Education Agency, invited children and their parents to attend ten Parent-Child Literacy Workshops held on Saturday mornings in the Spring of 1994. Initially, these teachers attempted to hold workshops for parents during their mutual planning periods, once a week, during the school day. Yet, it was soon discovered that in our neighborhood, almost all our mothers and fathers worked during the week. Those parents that stayed at home were helping their neighbors by providing neighborhood childcare services. Saturday mornings, twice each month, provided a convenient time for mothers, fathers, teachers, children, aunts, uncles, and grand parents, to come together and be part of The Parent-Child Literacy Acqusition Society.

Spanish and English speaking parents, together with

their children, began each Saturday session by listening to their child read in the language of their choice for 15 minutes in a soft tone. Both parents and children were taught the metacognitive strategy of finding a book that fits. Older vocabulary controlled readers were mixed with newer paperback novels, basal anthologies, and works of nonfiction to facilitate making this choice easy for parents and children. Both parents and children seemed comfortable in changing one book for another until one was found that was easy for each child to read. An easy book was defined as a book in which the reader knew most of the words. If the reader missed five words (not including proper nouns or good substitutions ) out of one hundred words on a page--the book was too hard and should be exchanged for an easier book. Proper nouns and good substitutions were not included in this word count. We discussed with parents the difference between good substitutions that did not seem to effect the meaning of a sentence and poor substitutions that did not make sense in a sentence.

We also shared with parents Guszak's fluency criteria for independent reading (1992). First grade -level readers were expected to read a minimum of 80 words a minute. Second grade

level- readers were expected to read a minimum of 90 words a minute and third grade - level readers ( or those above third grade) were expected to read 100 words per minute orally. We also explained to parents that by second grade , silent reading rates should be at least 20 words per minute faster than oral reading rates and explained that this difference should become greater as the child becomes older. Carver's 1992 finding that a typical girl in Grade 6 will read a history textbook at 177 words per minute and that a college student will generally read a college text at about 300 words per minute was shared with our parents who were then taught how to take a silent reading rate check. Parents began the Silent Reading Check procedure by assigning a student a section of text to read in 30 seconds. After the student had read silently, then the parent asked the student to retell orally the part of the text that was read silently. If the reader had demonstrated adequate comprehension, the words read in 30 seconds were counted and doubled to come up with the silent reading rate.

Parents practiced taking first a 20 second Oral Fluency Checks to access their on their child's oral reading rate and then a 30 second Silent Reading Check . We reminded parents that although

speed was important in oral reading, it was also important to read with good expression and shared with them a shortened version of Aull's Fluency scale wherein parents rated their children not only on speed but also on expression (cited in Lipton & Wixon, 1991). Student volunteers were asked to read orally, in front of the whole group, using a microphone, as parents and the other children finger rated oral reading by holding up four fingers if all the words were grouped in phrases, by holding up three fingers if most of the words were read in phrases, by holding up two fingers if words were read in two- word groups and by holding up one finger if students read word- by- word. The parents seemed to enjoy timing their children's oral reading rate and the children seemed to enjoy both being timed and being complimented by their parents regarding their good expressive reading. The teachers thought it was wonderful that (with coaching ) no child who volunteered to read on the microphone scored less than a 3 on Aull's fluency scale.

Children younger than five, were read to by either a parent, a teacher, or an older child. Initially, only five-year old non-readers were offered buildup readers (Guszak, 1992). Buildup readers are very redundant, very predictable, teacher made books

that start with a few words and build up by adding one word per page. Our buildup reader left a blank space in which the parent or older child would write in the younger child's name.

Page 1 Go, go
_____ go.
Go, _____, go.
Go, go, _____,
_____ go,go, go

Page 2 Can, can
_____can go.
Can _____go ?
_____ can go .
Go, _____, go.

Sometimes first-grade teacher, Carol Richardson (1994), likes to add local locations or popular cartoon characters to her buildup patterns.

Page 3 To, to, McDonalds
_____can go to McDonalds.
Go, _____, to McDonalds.
Can _____ go to McDonalds?
_____can go to McDonalds.

Page 4 Red, red
_____can go to red Jason.
Go, _____, go.
Go, _____, go to red Jason.
_____ can go.
Red Jason can go.
Go, go, go.

Color Jason Red

Red Jason

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Page 5 And, and
_____ and Jason (picture of red power ranger added here)
can go to McDonalds.
Can _____ and Jason go?
Go, Jason and _____

Richardson suggests that if you, as a teacher or parent, don't want to color all those Power Rangers, that you might want to consider either using stickers or asking the children to color them for you.

A Spanish language buildup reader, written by teacher Angelina Abrego (1994), utilized rebus writing with the following pattern:

Ayudo, ayuda
Ayudo, ayudo, ayudo.
Ayudo a (picture of a boy walking a dog).
(Picture of a father helping a child) me ayuda.
Mami me ayuda.
No ayudo. (picture of child laying on the bed with a stubborn expression on her face)

After one little four year old girl started crying, loudly, because her five year old sister would not share her buildup reader, we decided to offer build up readers to any child whose parents promised that he or she was old enough not to eat the books. The young children attending our workshops, seemed to love their buildup

readers.

Each parent and child was provided with a 2-inch ring, a hole punch and note cards to record any unknown words (Holdaway, 1979). We explained the Lipson and Wixon finding that one difference between good readers and poor readers was that good readers knew when they encountered an unknown word-- but, poor readers did not (1986). We challenged both parents and children to try and figure out the meaning and pronunciation of the unknown vocabulary word, but to then ask for adult or teacher verification of their prediction. We then asked students to take the time to practice each unknown word until it could be recognized automatically since knowledge of vocabulary is related to the comprehension of text (Lipson & Wixon, 1991) and since "repetition is needed to place a new word into a learner's shortterm memory , and further repetition is needed at a maintenance level to ensure that the word is firmly fixed as a sight word in longterm memory "( Hargis ,Terhaar-Yonkers, Williams, & Reed, 1988, p.320). Parents seemed surprised that we would advise the children to sometimes ask a friend or teacher the meaning or pronunciation of an unknown word rather than always going to a dictionary. We explained that although a dictionary was a useful tool

to determine the meaning of unknown words, it was only one of many tools we wanted to make available to our students.

In the classroom, it is not always possible for the teacher to be available to verify student predictions of unknown words. Therefore, in the classroom students must work out unkown words and meanings independently. Yet even in the classroom, we do ask students to make a note of unknown words and verify their meaning and pronunciation at some later time that is convenient with an adult or another child. At school, that might mean taking one's word cards to recess, and asking the teacher or a friend to verify unknown words while playing on the jungle gym. At home, that might be taking word cards to your mom or dad as s/he is folding clothes. As the child helps the parent with the clothes folding, s/he can share his or her word cards with mom or dad. Our students often hang their two inch word card ring on their belt loop. When a word is known automatically (including correct spelling), it can be thrown.

After the independent reading time, it was storytime. A short book was read and usually dramatized by the children in attendance. Parents and children alike seemed to enjoy the opportunities for the dramatic interpretation of such titles as The

Three Little Pigs (Galdone, 1970), Tikki Tikki Tembo ( Mosel, 1968), Alexander and the No Good Bad Day (Viorst, 1972), The Doorbell Rang (Hutchins, 1986) and Max (Isadora, 1976) The book chosen for dramatization represented the meeting theme. Other books related to this theme were compiled on a list that was then made available to parents and children. Themes included: Bears, Feelings, The Alphabet, Baseball, Pigs, Fun Food, Adventures, Treasures, Plants, and finally, SUMMERTIME. After story time, a variety of written and artistic response activities were suggested to the children. The older children helped the younger children get started and then worked quietly to complete their own projects. As the children worked quietly, teachers talked to parents about a different topic each week. Parent topics included: homework, time management, positive self-talk, learning styles, vocabulary development , the Dolch word list, phonics, sharing books, family reading activities, the relationship between TV and reading, text anxiety, listening skills, the role of writing in reading, home portfolios and the Texas Academic Skills Test (TASP) Reading Test. We were assisted in our selection of parent topics not only by teacher suggestions, but also by articles in The Reading Teacher, The Journal of Reading, and

Moke and Shermis's (1992, 1993) series of our books sponsored by the Family Literacy Center . In the discussion of phonics and reading, the parents seemed particularly interested in Gayla Seller's Vowel-Sound-Stick method of word attack. One father, in particular, shared with the group that he felt this particular technique might even help him personally with his on-the-job reading activities.

Each meeting's theme was reinforced with not only with stories, but also with songs related to the theme. When a commercial song could not be found related to the theme,a common tune was selected and then words were improvised to fit the tune. Students and parents were then asked to help create additional theme related verses to the song. The teacher would write these verses on a chart and supervise a group edit session, utilizing a language experience type technique. Each song was then reproduced or copied onto a chart and the song was practiced through an echo reading technique. The leader would read one line of the song. Then, the parents and children would repeat that line. Next, the parents were encouraged to copy and partner read the song with their child for ten minutes. The mother would read the first line, the father the second, the grandfather the third, the child the fourth and so on and

so on and so on. Once the song was practiced one time in this manner, family members were encouraged to switch the order of lines that were read. The importance of rereading familiar materials and the relationship between musical experiences and early reading was discussed. Finally, the song was sung as a whole group activity.

Since reading is comprehension, that is, getting your questions answered (Smith, 1978) each meeting modeled, demonstrated, and gave parents and children together a chance to practice together a different comprehension strategy . The children and parents seemed to particularly enjoy participating in an oral- story- map - chanting- activity, shared with me by a student from the University of Houston[1], related to the storytime selection. The leader would call:

> When I say character you say Who.
> Who is in this room? NO! Who was in the **story**.
> So...(call on individual) --who was in this story?
> _____was in this story.
>
> When I say setting, you say When and Where.
> When and where you will have lunch. No! When and
> where the **story** happens. So...(call on individual)--
> what was the setting of this story? _____was
> the setting of this story.

> When I say problem, you say "What's wrong?" What's wrong with your friend Tommy? No! What's wrong in the **story**. So...(call on individual)--what was the problem in this story? The problem in this story was ...
>
> When I say resolution, you say "How'd ya fix it?" How'd ya fix your broken bicycle chain? No! How'd they fix the problem in the **story**. So... (call on individual) what was the resolution of this story? The resolution in the story was...

Together, parents and children, listened to an explanation, watched the leader model the strategy, and then practiced together a reading comprehension strategy related to either determining word meanings from context clues (Guszak, 1992), elaborating on what was read from personal experiences (Ash, 1994), drawing a Herringbone map (Crawley & Mountain,1988), creating a cause and effect or a sequence diagram( Smith & Tompkins, 1988) , developing questions while reading (Balathy, 1984), writing a summary (Casazza, 1993), evaluating different question and answer response demands (Helfeldt & Henk, 1990), generating different types of main idea statements (Guszak, 1992) , employing strategies to help locate a stated main idea when reading nonfiction (Hennings, 1991), and remembering to relate

what you are reading to what you already know (Car & Ogle, 1987).

Thanks to the state of Texas, refreshments were provided for parents and children after the parent education session. In addition, the children were invited to choose to take home a paperback book to keep after they had eaten their refreshments. After each child had chosen his or her book, each child joined his parents to construct a theme related project. The children and their parents seemed to enjoy working together and reading the directions that would enable them to construct a bear puppet (Cannalla, Galle), an animal bookmark, a pig, a potted plant, a pencil holder, a heart pin-cushion, an alphabet mural, a bouncing baseball player, a treasure chest, or a jeweled tiara or sword. A model of the craft was taken around to classrooms on Friday when we reminded children orally about our next session.

A theme related Bingo game signaled the end of each meeting. Vocabulary words were taken from the stories, songs and chorally read poems related to the theme. Thanks to funding from the Texas Education Agency, it was possible to award prizes to the winners of these games. Dr. Laverne Hutchison, from University of Houston, suggested that useful home items be purchased as Bingo

prizes. Each child had the opportunity to win such things as a frying pan,a baking sheet, a tupperware bowl, or a set of glasses for his mom or dad. Although two commercial Bingo games practicing sight vocabulary and phonics were played at two meetings, generally, the bingo games were routinely created from vocabulary taken from shared reading activities related to the meeting theme. The children and parents copied the words in random order on blank Bingo cards as the leader wrote them and defined them orally on the overhead screen. Information from the 1930 study by Gates (cited by Hargis) relating to the number of word repetitions required by beginning readers was shared with parents who generally had been unaware that it took a student with an average I.Q., 35 repetitions of a word for mastery. This research study helped us reinforce our point that parents must encourage their children to practice their reading on a daily basis. For beginners, we recommended that parents and older brothers and sisters write books for these youngsters with very redundant sentence patterns and repeated vocabulary words.

Our last meeting ended with hugs and mutual thanks. In addition, our parents , children and teachers expressed to the leader

their gratitude to the State of Texas for the opportunities they were given to sing, to share, to write, to read, to talk and to create for 10 Saturdays a community of learners, living, loving, and laughing within the human milieu of social interactions that are the basis of the literacy acquisition process.

[1] If you were this student, please contact me. I know you used to teach first grade for the Springbranch ISD, but as I remember, you were in the middle of a job change. Contact me at 10534 Summerbrook, Houston, Texas 77038 so in the future, I can give you credit for this super activity. Both the parents and my current students really seem to appreciate this activity.

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